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S E C R E T BOGOTA 002518

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SUBJECT: FARC IDEOLOGY ON THE BACKBURNER

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Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (C) The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) began in 1964 as a Marxist insurgency dedicated to redressing rural grievances, at a time when the democratic left had been politically marginalized. Over time, illicit activity and alienation from the democratic left have taken the FARC farther away from its ideological roots. Academics and analysts contend the FARC is providing minimal ideological training to its foot soldiers, and the leaders themselves often espouse FARC rhetoric more out of habit, than from a ideological commitment. As the GOC continues to apply military pressure, the FARC will likely continue to let its ideological foundations slide and increase its reliance on illicit activities in response to the daily pressures and necessities of the conflict. END SUMMARY.

Evolution of Ideology

[¶](#)2. (C) The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) began in 1964 as a rural, Marxist insurgency dedicated to addressing grievances regarding land rights and wealth distribution, at a time when the left had been politically marginalized. Over time, the insurgency began relying increasingly on illicit activity, such as the narcotics trade, kidnapping, and extortion, to fund its fight. This activity drove a wedge with its political counterpart, the Communist Party, until the two entities split in the early 1990s. This split, coupled with the FARC's growing involvement in illicit activity, marked a turning point in the development and indoctrination of FARC fighters in Marxist ideology. Communist Party leader and FARC interlocutor Carlos Lozano told poloff that in the 1970s and 1980s the Colombian Communist Party assisted in the political and ideological education of guerrilla fighters. Party members taught classes on Marxist ideology in FARC schools.

Union Patriotica member and academic Alvaro Echeverri told poloffs the FARC reached a point where it no longer needed the support of the Communist Party--which by this time had become critical of the FARC's illicit activity--and the two groups split. Colombian National Police Intelligence (DIPOL) analysts said the FARC was slow to appreciate the impact the Soviet Union's collapse had on Marxist ideology, but in recent years has shifted away from Marxist rhetoric in favor of Chavez,s Bolivarian ideology.

Ideology Wearing Thin...

¶3. (S) Criminal and terrorist activities, decreased discipline, and Colombian military pressure have contributed to the degradation of FARC ideological beliefs and indoctrination over the past 20 years. The growing use of terrorist tactics marks a break with the FARC,s traditional guerrilla warfare and contradicts its ideology and political platform. According to ref A, as recently as January FARC supreme leader Manuel Marulanda reminded FARC forces in a secret communique to respect civilians--in keeping with basic

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guerrilla warfare doctrine--but the FARC's recent anti-election offensive in Caqueta and Huila Departments suggest guerrillas are disregarding this instruction (ref B). Echeverri saw these attacks as a sign that the conflict has degraded over time. Violence against civilians was once punishable in the FARC, but is now the norm.

¶4. (S) Lozano, Echeverri, and the DIPOL all commented that the rank-and-file are poorly indoctrinated. Lozano reports that since the break with the Communist Party and the loss of those instructors, the FARC has been unable to pass its ideology on to the next generation of fighters. He claimed FARC schools have become military training centers with little or no indoctrination taking place. In addition, Lozano said the constant military pressure and need for new fighters denies the FARC the time to adequately instruct its new recruits. Lozano reported that a strong ideological background has become less important for advancement through FARC ranks than military prowess and, as a result, a growing number of FARC up-and-comers are not grounded in the organization,s presumed beliefs. Marulanda acknowledged this phenomenon in his communiq, in which he commented that some FARC members are rising through the ranks without fully understanding the organization,s ideology (ref A). DIPOL analysts commented that most rank-and-file today are illiterate. The analysts reported that recent deserters had in their possession notebooks in which phrases like "Marulanda is my leader" and "Uribe is a fascist" were written repeatedly on the pages, suggesting psychological operations rather than indoctrination to keep new recruits.

¶5. (S) The loss of role models has also undermined FARC ideology, according to Echeverri. He said FARC ideologue and leader Jacobo Arenas, the UP's Alberto Rojas, and Communist leaders set "good examples" for earlier generations of FARC rank-and-file, but no longer. Ref A reported FARC leaders are seeking to keep insurgents away from the democratic left for fear of losing their support to leftist political parties, further depriving today's FARC of leftist role models. Both Lozano and Echeverri linked this lack of indoctrination to an increase in barbaric acts by FARC insurgents. Lozano commented that past FARC fighters understood from an ideological perspective when and why to fire their weapons, but today,s FARC militants shoot almost indiscriminately.

...But Still Serves a Purpose

¶6. (S) While the FARC may still publicly espouse an ideology, the reasons for supporting it within the organization are varied. Both DIPOL analysts and Echeverri told poloffs that

a cadre of FARC leaders, headed by Secretariat member Alfonso Cano, still believe in the FARC's ideology, but that most mid-level leaders and lower ranks do not. While these FARC leaders may recite the appropriate rhetoric, their desire for economic wealth drives their continued presence in the organization. Indeed, Echeverri referred to the FARC's rhetoric as "self-justifying discourse for its illicit activities." As an example, DIPOL analysts reported that even some Secretariat members, such as Mono Jojoy, have economic resources stashed away for their own personal use or for their family's benefit, rather than to support the FARC's revolutionary cause. Echeverri and DIPOL analysts also noted the importance of the FARC's 40-year history and tradition in compelling its members to maintain at least a veneer of ideology. The FARC has responded to President Uribe's own hard stance against the insurgency with increased intransigence, making it more important for the FARC to maintain a public hardline on its ideological and political positions.

Message Lost on the Masses

¶7. (S) The FARC's ideological message and political beliefs have been overshadowed by its military and criminal actions, diminishing what little support the group had domestically and internationally. DIPOL analysts said the FARC uses attacks against the population to create social and political pressure on the GOC to force it to the negotiating table, but such attacks diminish popular support for the insurgency. Uribista parties running in the March 12 legislative elections dominated the departments where the FARC has been most active, such as Caqueta, Huila, Putumayo, Tolima, Guaviare, and Vaupes (although the Liberal Party finished first in Antioquia, where the FARC has also been active), despite lower voter turnout. DIPOL analysts said the FARC is increasingly isolated, and must now seek out attention from academics and politicians, when in the past these figures sought out the insurgents. These analysts also said the rise of the democratic left in Colombia and in the region has further undermined any support people once gave the FARC by providing them with a more peaceful alternative.

Comment: Ideologues on Thin Ice

¶8. (S) The FARC's ideological grounding will likely deteriorate further if the GOC maintains military pressure on the insurgency. Military pressure not only denies the insurgents time to indoctrinate new recruits and fortify its ideology, but gives the more militaristic members of the organization dominance over those with a greater ideological bent. The need for financial resources to keep the fight going will probably also contribute to the rise of those most successful in fundraising, usually through illicit activities. These same individuals tend to be in the organization for financial interests, rather than ideological beliefs. Marulanda's death could further move the FARC away from its ideological roots, particularly if he is replaced by a more militant leader or if his death provokes a split within the organization.

WOOD